



PRESS RELEASE

22 June 2022

Public thematic report

STATE MONUMENTAL HERITAGE POLICY

Established in the 19th century out of a desire to save the nation's heritage, the monumental heritage policy has continued to expand to cover an increasingly wide range of monuments and heritage sites. While 44,540 buildings were covered by the historic monuments system in the strict sense in 2020, in reality several hundred thousand buildings and surrounding areas are protected as the surroundings of historic monuments (national domains, remarkable heritage sites, classified and listed sites and cultural properties listed as world heritage). Essentially focused on conservation, public spending - which stood at more than €1.3 bn before the health crisis - increased significantly between 2019 and 2021 due to the sharp increase in state credits allocated to major works and the amounts committed under the recovery plan. Yet, while the state and local authorities can make claims about the scale and constancy of this support, the overall expenditure remains poorly estimated. In addition, the latest assessment of the condition of historic monuments carried out in 2018 revealed that almost a quarter of them are in a worrying state. In the report published today, the Court of Auditors makes a series of recommendations aimed at consolidating public spending while ensuring the protection and enhancement of the monuments and sites.

A long-standing policy facing the challenges of protecting a vast heritage

The monumental heritage policy is facing the challenges of protecting a vast heritage (including listed historic buildings/monuments, their surroundings, remarkable heritage sites, etc.) which requires substantial public expenditure. In 2021, total public spending on this was €2.01 bn, compared to €1.31 bn in 2019 and €1.43 bn in 2020. However, the overall expenditure remains poorly understood. The Ministry of Culture does not have exhaustive knowledge of the State's consolidated expenditure and the estimate of the effort made by local authorities appears even more patchy. In addition, in 2018, 23.3% of historic monuments were classified as being in poor condition or at risk.

Persistent structural weaknesses in the face of new challenges for the heritage policy

In 2009, a major reform of the project ownership and management of conservation operations took place, whereby the development of conservation projects is now the responsibility of the owner and the management of historic buildings/monuments is no longer the exclusive responsibility of chief architects. However, the Court considers that the results of these two very important reforms are disappointing. In terms of volume, the expected increase in conservation operations has not materialised, in particular because local authorities have not sufficiently organised their project ownership practices. Furthermore, although the reform of project ownership has led to an increase in the number of heritage architects, their regional distribution and their inconsistent technical level are two weak points. The modernisation of legal protection mechanisms remains unfinished, while the reform of heritage sites is slow to be completed. In this context, the weakening of the human resources in charge of implementing this policy is a matter of increasing concern. Widespread retirement in the coming years among the architects of French buildings recruited during the 1980s, the unattractiveness (both in terms of remuneration and career prospects) and the excessively administrative nature of their tasks make it necessary to reconsider the overall management of human resources.

An overall strategy requiring more cross-cutting approaches


The Court points out that, to date, there are major disparities between regions and that the dominant orientation of heritage policy towards the conservation and legal protection of monuments and sites leaves too little room for an integrated approach involving consultation with local stakeholders. Such an approach is essential for small and medium-sized towns that have a remarkable heritage but are facing economic and social difficulties. The State must therefore do much more to promote strategies for the development of urban heritage districts. Finally, state heritage policy is excessively partitioned between its three pillars: protection, conservation and enhancement. The Court considers that this policy should be more comprehensive and integrated, taking into full consideration all the possible uses of classified buildings and ensuring that they are better promoted and enhanced at all levels of society.

[Read the report](#)

PRESS CONTACTS:


Emmanuel Kessler ■ Director of Communications ■ T 01 42 98 97 43 ■ 06 62 48 07 81 ■ emmanuel.kessler@ccomptes.fr

Julie Poissier ■ Press Relations Manager ■ T 01 42 98 97 43 ■ 06 87 36 52 21 ■ <mailto:julie.poissier@ccomptes.fr>

 @Courdescomptes

 ccomptes

 Cour des comptes

 Cour des comptes